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ABSTRACT

The increasing numbers of married women working make the study of dual career mothers an important topic for the psychology of women. Such research is vital to helping women integrate careers with family life. A study was conducted to examine the extent to which gender role, number of hours worked per week, and number and age of children relate to mothers' interrole conflict and perception of parental role responsibilities. Married mothers (N=130) who also had a career completed a demographic questionnaire, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, the Perception of Parental Role Scales, and the Inter-role Conflict Scale. Results from a canonical analysis revealed a relationship between two sets of variables: expressiveness, androgyny, and number of children over age 19 (set 1) were related to the degree of professional/parent inter-role conflict, professional/self inter-role conflict, and the perceived importance of the parent's role as interface between child and family (set 2). (Author/NB)

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Dual Career Mothers' Role Conflict, Parental Roles, and Gender Roles

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Abstract

The increasing numbers of married women working make dual career mothers an important topic for the psychology of women. This research reports empirical data on married mothers who have careers (N=130). Subjects were given three measures and a demographic questionnaire to answer the following question: To what extent does gender role, number of hours worked per week, and number and age of children relate to mothers' inter-role conflict and perception of parental role responsibilities? Subjects filled out three measures: Personal Attributes Questionnaire, Perception of Parental Role Scales, and Inter-role Conflict Scale. A canonical analysis was employed to ascertain how the attributes of gender role, number of hours worked each week and number and age of children related to mothers' perception of parental roles and inter-role conflict. Results of this study indicate a relationship between two sets of variables: expressiveness, androgyny and number of children over 19 (set 1) and professional parent inter-role conflict, interface role between child and family, and professional/self inter-role conflict (set 2).

Dual Career Mothers' Role Conflict,
Parental Roles, and Gender Roles

Women's lives have changed substantially over the past 25 years. The impact of this change on the economic, sociological and familial patterns of our nation has only begun to be understood. Many studies have explored different aspects of women's changing roles, from professional identity to expanding conceptions of motherhood. Much has been learned and much more remains to be discovered.

Research on the complexities of working women has lagged behind social changes in society. Research is needed to better understand working mothers' needs, pressures, and conflicts. This research describes empirical research on dual career mothers role conflicts, perceived parent role responsibilities and selected personality and demographic correlates.

Literature exists on the multiple demands that women face in dual career marriages (Yogev, 1981, Berger, Foster, Wallston and Wright, 1977, Elman and Gilbert, 1984). Dual career women with children have especially complex lives. Dual career mothers are expected to be nurturant parents, responsive spouses, career oriented and to manage all these roles efficiently. Dual career mothers usually experience conflict in fulfilling all these roles. While it is known that engaging in many roles can lead to higher levels of self esteem (Baruch and Barnett. 1980, Birnbaum, 1975) inter-role strain can surface in many situations. Johnson and Johnson (1977) found that dual career mothers' greatest strain emanated from their maternal role. They found dual career mothers reported high degrees of guilt and anxiety. Holahan and Gilbert (1979) found that dual career families with preschool

children experienced the highest degree of role conflict. Rapoport and Rapoport (1969) reported that women experience strain from the transformation of roles, and Price, Bonham and Murphy (1980) found that role structure itself caused stress in the dual career family. Additionally, empirical research has shown that women experience conflicts between professional and spousal roles (Berger, Foster, Wallston & Wright, 1977).

Numerous authors have argued that inter-role conflict exists and discussed it's outcomes in womens' lives. Several authors attribute the level of conflict to the multiple roles women embrace. (Pleck, 1977, Hall, 1972). Some authors (Gilbert, 1984, Pepitone-Rockwell, 1980) discuss the conflict in terms of internal versus external pressures. The evidence regarding the outcomes of these conflicts is quite clear. There is much documentation indicating that dual career wives give priority to family-parental roles over career-personal roles (Holstrom, 1972; Paloma, 1972; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1971; Paloma & Garland, 1971).

Gender roles are central to understanding the stresses and strains of dual career mothers. Much of the literature on dual career women is not empirical but conceptual in nature. Dual career couples' gender role dilemmas (O'Neil, Fishman, & Kinsella-Shaw, 1987) have ben conceptualized as sex role tensions (Parker, Peltier & Wolleat, 1981), sex role expectation, (Gilbert, 1984), sex role sanctions (Johnson & Johnson, 1977), and sex role identity problems (Gaddy, Glass, & Arnkoff, 1983).

The dual career mother is considered by the "gender role status quo" to behave in a manner inappropriate to her gender. She may experience external criticism and devaluation from traditional mothers, and internal anxiety about whether she is a "good mother". This anxiety may be

experienced as identity dilemmas (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969) as roles and functions change.

Research on dual career women has assesses some of the general factors women face (i.e. role conflict and gender role issues), but specific variables effecting womens' lives have received limited attention. For example, the number and age of children, number of hours worked, and womens' perceived role responsibilities have received limited attention. Given the paucity of research on these variables, the following hypothesis was tested:

> There will be a significant relationship between gender role orientation, number and ages of children, number of hours worked per week (first variable set), and perception of parental role responsibilities and inter-role conflict (second variable set).

Method

Subjects

The target population for the research was women in dual career marriages who have at least one child under the age of 12, or have children who were under 12 when the women became involved in their career. Women meeting this criteria (N=208) were sent self report questionnaires through the mail. Subjects returning the completed questionnaires (N= 146) yielded a 69% return rate. Those questionnaires that were useable totalled 130, representing a 61% return rate. The average age of the subjects was 38.8 years and the average length of their marriages was 14.4 years. Subjects also reported the mean number of years in their career as 12.2 years and mean average of hours worked per week as 39 hours. Educational levels of

the subjects included: 3% high school degree, 3% Associates Degree, 25% B.A. degree, 41.5% master, 19.2 % 6th. year, and 8% Ph. D. degrees completed. Seventy-five percent of the subjects categorized themselves as feminist women.

The sample (N-208) was gathered from personal contact and computer generated lists of graduate students enrolled in a northeastern university. The survey, along with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, an assurance of confidentiality and the offer of the final results of the study, was sent out initially. A follow - up postcard, for those who did not respond, was sent out 10 days later.

Instrumentation

Three psychometrically sound measures were employed in this research as well as demographic questionnaire. The three measures are the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), the Parental Role Responsibility Questionnaire (Gilbert & Hanson, 1982) and the Inter-role Conflict Scale (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979). Each is described below.

Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) (short form). The 24- item instrument measures instrumental and expressives personality traits. There are three scales: masculine (instrumental), feminine (expressive), and masculine-feminine. The median score for the M and F scales is determined, with subjects above the median of the M scale classified as instrumental, and those above the median of the F scale classified as expressive. Subjects above the median of both the M and F scale are considered androgynous, while those who are below the median of both are considered undifferentiated. A Cronbach alpha internal consistency reliability was found to be .82 for female students (Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

Perceptions of Parental Roles Scales (PPRS). The PPRS measures parents' beliefs about the importance of a variety of parental responsibilities, including cognitive development, health care, and the interface between child and social institutions. A 5-point Likert-type scale is used, with responses ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important), thus higher scores are associated with greater perceived importance. The mean item score is obtained by adding the responses for each item on that scale, and dividing the sum by the number of items responded to on that scale. The four scales used in this study are: Teaching Cognitive Development, Teaching Survival Skills, Meeting the Emotional Needs of the Child, and Interface Role Between Child and Family. PRRQ's coefficient alpha ranges from .81 to .91.

Inter-role Conflict Scales (IRCS). The IRCS measures the amount of stress experienced in areas of potential inter-role conflict. Reliability on each of the scales ranges from .75 to .88. A 5-point Likert-type scale is used, with responses ranging from 1 (no internal conflict) to 5 (high internal conflict) for each item. Higher scores thus indicate greater conflict. There is also a "not applicable" (n/a) response option available. The four scales used in this study are: Professional/Parent, Professional/Spouse, Professional/Self, and Parent/Self.

Design and Hypothesis

_The following precursor variables are used in this study: Gender role orientation(expressiveness, instrumentality, androgyny, undifferentiated), number of hours worked per week, number and ages of children. The relationship between these precursor variables and the outcome variables of

inter-role conflict and perception of parental role responsibilities are analyzed. The specific hypothesis tested in this research was:

> There will be a significant relationship between gender role orientation (expressive, instrumental, androgynous, undifferentiated), number and ages of children, number of hours worked per week (first variable set), and perception of parental role responsibilities (teaching cognitive development, teaching survival skills, meeting the emotional needs of the child, interface between child and family) and inter-role conflict (professional/spouse, professional/self, professional/ parent, parent/self) (second variable set).

Statistical Analysis

A canonical analysis was performed on the set of demographic and gender role variables and the set of attitudinal variables. The demographic and gender role set included number of hours worked, number of children under 5, number of children ages 5 through 12, number of children ages 13 through 19, and number of children over 19. Also included was gender role orientation, designated as expressive, instrumental, androgynous, or undifferentiated (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Larger numbers for the demographic information indicate more hours worked, and larger number of children in each age group. The attitudinal variables included perception of parental role responsibilities as measured by scores on the following scales of the PPRS: teaching cognitive development, teaching survival skills, meeting the emotional needs of the child, and interface role between child and family. Also included are perceptions of inter-role conflict as measured by the IRC on the following scales: professional/parent, professional/self, professional/spouse, and spouse/parent. Larger numbers indicate increased

perceived importance of particular parental role responsibilities, and increasing perceived inter-role conflict.

Results

Demographic Information

The following demographic data are presented to further describe the sample population. Table 1 presents the means, range and standard deviations for certain demographic information, including subject's age, number of years in present marriage, number of years in career, and number of children. The mean age was 38.8, with a range of 27 to 54 years.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The mean number of years in present marriage was 14.4, with a range of 1.5 to 33 years. The women in this sample had been involved in their careers between .5 to 30 years, with a mean of 12.2. They had from 1 to 5 children, with a mean of 2.07.

Table 2 presents the number of women who had children in each age

Insert Table 2 About Here

group (under 5 years, 5 - 12 years, 13 - 19 years, and over 19). Sixty-three percent (n=83) had no children under five years, 29.2% (n=38) had one child under five, 6.2% (n=8) had two children under five, and .77% (n=1) had three children under five years of age. In the category "number of children between 5 and 12 years", 55.4% (n=72) had no children, 26% (n=34) had one child, 15.4% (n=20) had two children, and 3.1% (n=4) had three children. Sixty-three percent (n=83) had no children from 13 to 19 years of age, 22%

(n=29) had one child 13 to 19, 10.8% (n=14) had two children 13 to 19, and 3.8% (n=5) had three children 13 to 19. Over 81% (n=106) had no children over 19 years, 4.6% (n=6) had one child over 19, 6.2% (n=8) had two children over 19, 6.15% (n=8) had three children over 19, and 1.5% (n=2) had four children over 19 years of age.

Table 3 presents information regarding the subjects' level of completed

Insert Table 3 About Here.

education. The majority of subjects had completed at least a BA/BS degree, with 41.5% (n=54) holding Master's Degrees. Slightly over 3% (n=4) had completed high school, and the same number had an associates degree. Over 25% (n=33) had completed their bachelors degree, and 19.2% (n=25) had a sixth year degree. In addition, 7.7% (n=10) had received their doctorates. Table 4 presents the means, range and standard deviations of Perceptions of

Insert Table 4 About Here

Parental Role Responsibilities scores, which were scored on a scale of 1 to 5. Table 5 presents the means, range and standard deviations of Inter-role

Insert Table 5 About Here

Conflict Scores, which were also scored on a scale of 1 to 5.

Interpretation of the Significant Canonical Variate

Among the 8 canonical correlations derived, only the first was significant: X^2 (64) = 104.75, $p < .001$. Therefore, only the first pair of canonical variates were interpreted. Standardized canonical coefficients, analogous to beta weights in multiple regression, were used to interpret the single canonical variate.

The first canonical correlation was .60, representing 37% overlapping variance between the two sets. The variables relevant to the first canonical variate in the precursor set were, in order of magnitude, expressiveness (standardized weight = .715), number of children over 19 (-.601), and androgyny (.591), as shown in Table 6. These weights suggest that women

Insert Table 6 About Here

who are categorized as expressive (nurturant, interested in promoting harmonious relationships, and aware of other's feelings) or androgynous (possessing expressive qualities and instrumental qualities such as independence, self confidence and achievement orientation) are more likely than instrumental or undifferentiated women to experience the second set of relevant variables (see below) as personally applicable. The standardized canonical coefficient for number of children over 19 (.601) suggests that women with greater numbers of children over 19 are less likely to experience the second set of relevant variables as applicable to themselves.

Among the outcome variables, professional/parent inter-role conflict (.969), interface between child and family (.783) and professional/self inter-role conflict (-.600) best described the canonical variate. This suggests that

women who experience a greater degree of conflict between their professional and parental roles, but less conflict between the demands of their professional role and that of fulfilling their personal (self) needs are more likely to have the personal attributes described as the strongest precursor variables (i.e. expressiveness, androgyny, fewer children over 19). Additionally, those subjects who also perceive being an interface between child and family as more important are more likely to report the first set of relevant variables as pertinent.

Taken as a pair, the first canonical variates indicate that those who perceive themselves as expressive or (less so) androgynous, and have fewer children over 19 years of age, tend to have greater conflict between their professional and parental roles, perceive their role as interface between their child and the family to be of great import, and have less conflict between their professional role and their personal needs.

For the precursor variables, number of hours worked, number of children under 5, between 5 to 12, and between 13 to 19 were not found to be significantly related to the factors in the second set of variables. In the second set, the following were found to be not significantly related to the first set of variables: teaching cognitive development, teaching survival skills, meeting emotional needs of the child, professional/spouse inter-role conflict, and parent/self inter-role conflict.

The overall hypothesis tested in this research was:

> There will be a significant relationship between gender role orientation (expressive, instrumental, androgynous, undifferentiated), number and ages of children, number of hours worked per week (first variable set), and perception of parental role

responsibilities (teaching cognitive development, teaching survival skills, meeting the emotional needs of the child, interface between child and family) and inter-role conflict (professional/spouse, professional/self, professional/ parent, parent/self) (second variable set).

The overall hypothesis tested in this research is not rejected. This statement is made with reservations, since there is a linkage between the first pair of canonical variates, significant at the .001 level, but certain variables do not contribute. Specifically, the precursor variable number of hours worked, and the consequence variables teaching cognitive development, teaching survival skills, meeting emotional needs, professional/spouse inter-role conflict and parent/self inter-role conflict were not found to account for notable amounts of variance.

On the other hand, several prominent connections are observed. Women categorized as expressive or androgynous were linked to 1) more professional/parent role conflict, 2) less professional/self role conflict and 3) increased perceived importance of functions related to the interface between child and family than women categorized as instrumental or undifferentiated.

Although a significant standardized canonical coefficient is present for number of children older than 19 (-.601), no other variables regarding number and age of children rendered significant results. Therefore, it can also be stated that women with more children over 19 show a different profile of the relevant outcome variables than do those with children under 19. In particular, these women may not experience as high a degree of conflict between their professional and parental roles, while their degree of professional/self inter-role conflict may not be as low as those dual career

mothers with children under 19. These women also may be less likely to perceive the interface between child and family as important.

Discussion

Research on dual career mothers is vital to helping women integrate careers with family life. The present research is unique in selecting women with both careers and children and assessing how selected precursor variables may explain inter-role conflict and parental responsibilities.

This research found the sample population experienced more inter-role conflict than Holahan & Gilbert's (1979) sample population on three of the four scales utilized (professional/spouse (2.2 vs. 2.1), professional/parent (2.646 vs. 2.28), and parent/self (2.772 vs. 2.71)). The only scale where this was not the case was professional/self inter-role conflict (2.56 vs. 2.77) which was also an important canonical coefficient in the outcome variable set. The average of the four scales was 2.54, which is also higher than Sekaran's (1983) single score (2.28) of multiple role stress in dual career women. Additionally, scores on Perception of Parental Role Scales were higher for this population than those reported by Gilbert & Hanson (1983) on three of the four scales used (teaching cognitive development (4.26 vs. 4.21), meeting the emotional needs of the child (4.85 vs. 4.64), and interface between child and family (4.34 vs. 4.1). Teaching survival skills was the scale where lower scores than those of Gilbert & Hanson (1983) were reported (3.94 vs. 4.1). The population in this study appears to experience greater role conflict overall than other populations where that variable has been measured, and perceive certain parental role responsibilities as more important than other samples.

Canonical correlation analysis showed significant results for the first pair of canonical variates at the .001 level. Standardized canonical coefficients were used to interpret the single canonical correlation, which showed that the two sets of variables overlapped 37%. Expressiveness, number of children over 19, and androgyny were relevant in the precursor set, and professional/parent inter-role conflict, interface between child and family and professional/self inter-role conflict were relevant in the outcome set of variables.

The analysis showed the precursor variables, number of hours worked, number of children under five, number of children five to twelve, and number of children 13 to 19 were not importantly related to the second set of variables. In the second set, teaching cognitive development, teaching survival skills, meeting the emotional needs of the child, professional/spouse inter-role conflict, and parent/self inter-role conflict were found to be unrelated to the first set of variables.

Although Johnston (1984) found greater number of hours worked per week was related to increased inter-role conflict, that was not the case for this population. In addition, number of children in the three youngest age groups was not related to inter-role conflict or perception of parental role responsibilities. This contradicts findings of Lieber (1980) and Jump (1986) but supports Sund and Ostwald's (1985) finding that number of children was unrelated to family stress level. Sund and Ostwald also reported that age of children is related to stress levels, with those families with older children reporting less stress, similar to the findings here. A possible reason for some results contrary to earlier work is that the earlier work used univariate analyses instead of multivariate approaches.

The results of this study indicate that expressiveness, androgyny and number of children over 19 are related to the degree of professional/parent inter-role conflict, professional/self inter-role conflict and the perceived importance of the parent's role as interface between child and family. This indicates that women with fewer children over 19 years of age who have expressive qualities such as caring and nurturance, or high levels of both instrumental (i.e. independence, self confidence) and expressive traits, experience a greater conflict between their professional and parental roles. It appears that younger children demand more attention, thus increasing the number of parental responsibilities, while the professional duties require the same commitment of time. Many authors have reported that professional/parent inter-role conflict is a significant problem for dual career mothers. Holahan and Gilbert (1979) found those families with preschool children had the highest level of role conflict. That was not indicated in this study. For mothers in dual career marriages, the needs of the children and the needs of the career frequently conflict. This study found this to occur more specifically in women who describe themselves as nurturant and giving, rather than simply independent, self reliant and achievement oriented. Elman & Gilbert (1984) found those dual career women with children who rated higher in coping effectiveness also reported lower degrees of role conflict, which leads to speculation that coping effectiveness is related to instrumentality.

The present research indicates women who report high levels of both instrumental and expressive traits also are more likely to experience professional/parent role conflict. This may indicate expressive traits are an important factor in understanding this particular role conflict. Rotheram and

Weiner (1983) found while androgynous persons experienced more professional stress, they also had higher level of personal satisfaction. A lower degree of conflict between their professional role and personal needs was reported by the women in this study. Cooper, Chassin, & Zeiss (1985) found androgynous individuals reported higher levels of personal adjustment than others. This may indicate that dual career mothers with high levels of expressive traits are likely to be more concerned with their families than their own needs, and so do not see their professional role as conflicting with their own needs, but rather with the needs of their children. In fact, they may see their professional role as one that is personally fulfilling, and thus do not experience conflict between those two roles. Additionally, building harmonious relationships between the child and nuclear and extended family is perceived as an important parental role responsibility by those mothers who are expressive and androgynous. As developing harmony and concern for other's well-being are descriptors of the expressive personality trait, these women perceiving the interface role as important makes theoretical sense. Since women give top priority to their family role (Holstrom, 1972, Poloma, 1972), and perceive childcare to be their responsibility (Yogev, 1981), it is not surprising that they perceive the interface role as one of importance.

There were important limitations to this study that require cautious interpretation. First, the sample was limited to professional and personal acquaintances and graduate students at one university. Thus, although all were mothers and members of dual career families, the results may not be readily generalizable. It was not a random sample.

A second limitation is the self reporting nature of the instruments. Although reliabilities for each were noteworthy, they may vary to a certain extent day to day, particularly those items on the inter-role conflict scale. There may also be misinterpretation or misunderstanding of particular questions. Although the researcher's phone number was available to respondents to clarify any questions, there is no guarantee this opportunity was exploited.

The results of this study indicate a relationship between two sets of variables: expressiveness, androgyny and number of children over 19 (set 1) and professional/parent inter-role conflict, interface role between child and family, and professional/self inter-role conflict (set 2). It appears that dual career mothers' lives are complex. Through the continued efforts of dual career couples, counselors and researchers, better appreciation and understanding of the issues may help all involved to lead richer, more fulfilled lives.

TABLE 1

Means, Range and Standard Deviations
of Demographic Information

	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Range
Subjects' Age	38.8	6.5	27-54
Number of years in present marriage	14.4	7.5	1.5-33
Number of years in career	12.2	6.7	.5-30
Number of children	2.07	.92	1-5

TABLE 2

Summary of Number of Women Who
Have Children in Each Age Group

	Number of Children									
	no children		one		two		three		four	
Age Group	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
under 5 yrs	83	63	38	29.2	8	6.2	1	.77	0	
5-12 yrs.	72	55.4	34	26	20	15.4	4	3.1	0	
13-19 yrs.	83	63	29	22	14	10.8	5	3.8	0	
over 19 yrs.	106	81.6	6	4.6	8	6.2	8	6.1	2	1.5

TABLE 3

Level of Education Completed

	n	%
High School	4	3.07%
Associates Degree	4	3.07%
BA/BS	33	25.4%
MA/MS	54	41.5%
6th. Year	25	19.2%
Ph. D.	10	7.7%

TABLE 4

Means, Range and Standard Deviations of
Perceptions of Parental Role Responsibilities

	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Range
Teaching Cognitive Development	4.26	.552	2.5 - 5
Teaching Survival Skills	3.94	.574	2.6 - 5
Meeting the Emotional Needs of the Child	4.85	.277	3.6 - 5
Interface Role Between the Child and the Family	4.34	.638	1.6 - 5

TABLE 5

Means, Range and Standard Deviations
of Inter-role Conflict Scales

	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	Range
Professional/Spouse IRC	2.213	.992	1 - 4.5
Professional/Self IRC	2.565	.921	1 - 4.5
Professional/Parent IRC	2.646	.969	1 - 4.75
Parent/Self IRC	2.772	.942	1 - 5

TABLE 6

Standardized Coefficients for
Significant Canonical Correlation

Precursor Variables	Coefficient	Outcome Variables	Coeffieient
Androgyny[1]	.591*	Teaching Cog. Dev.	-.273
Expressiveness[1]	.715*	Teaching Surv. Skills	-.347
Undifferentiatedness[1]	.191	Meeting Emot. Needs	.117
Hours Worked per Week	-.108	Interface Child/Family	.783*
Number Children under 5	-.281	Professional/Spouse IRC	.036
Number Children 5 to 12	-.101	Professional/Self IRC	-.600*
Number Children 13 to 19	.059	Professional/Parent IRC	.969*
Number Children over 19	-.601*	Parent/Self IRC	-.387

[1]used in dummy coding with instrumentality as the control

*important canonical coefficients

Teaching Cog. Dev. = Teaching Cognitive Development

Teaching Surv. Skills = Teaching Survival Skills

Meeting Emotional Needs = Meeting Emotional Needs of the Child

Interface Child/Family=Interface Role Between Child and Family

IRC = Inter-role Conflict

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